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ABSTRACT

Education continues to be blamed for many of society's ills and the liberal arts and the occupational training advocates continue to argue about which is more important. What is needed is a new perspective that focuses on education as the acquisition of basic and general skills rather than the acquisition of either knowledge per se or narrow technical skills alone. Skill is defined as the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance; career is defined as a course of continued progress, a profession, or calling. Their interrelationship is pyramidal, with skills leading toward careers. It is suggested that emphasis is needed on basic general skills, with efforts made to show students how these can be applied to certain career jobs in a practical way. Experiential learning opportunities to supplement a student's academic work are advocated. An example of a liberal arts college offering a specialty in transportation planning and analysis is given, and recommended courses are listed. (LBH)

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LIBERAL ARTS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

by William B. Seiniger

As education continues to be blamed for many of society's ills, the liberal arts and the occupational training advocates continue to argue. The controversy is a reflection of our confused values. Today, we tend to look for the quick return over the promised benefits of long term goals. What is needed is a new perspective that focuses on education as the acquisition of basic and general skills rather than the acquisition of either knowledge or narrow technical skills alone.

What is a Skill?

An all-purpose definition of skill has troubled educators and manpower specialists for a long time. One definition, however, is at least serviceable. Skill is the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance[1]. That means that a skill requires two acts: the first is the acquisition of knowledge and the second is learning how to use that knowledge effectively in the performance of one or more jobs. In many cases, educators have been concerned solely with the acquisition of knowledge and have not cared about its effective use. At the same time, those concerned with occupational training have been preoccupied with specific

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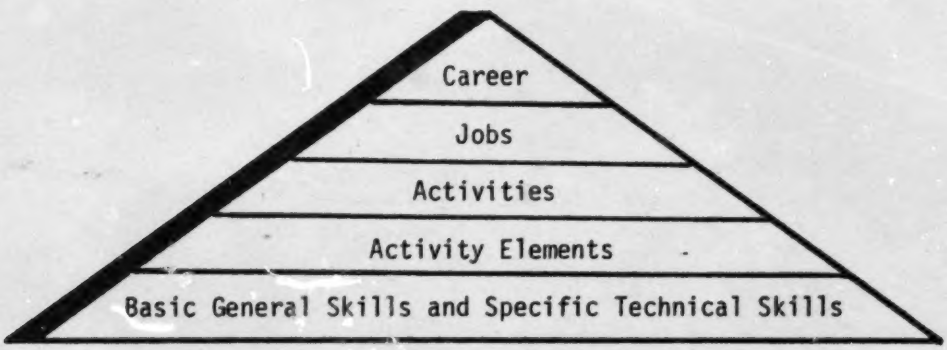
[1]Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged. 1971 Edition

technical knowledge and its use and have been less concerned with basic general knowledge and skills such as those to be gained from a study of history, languages, geography, philosophy, etc. The latter, properly presented, can train one in the skills of analysis, synthesis, communications, human relations and a wide range of basic skills that are in demand in most occupations.

What is a Career?

A career is defined as a course of continued progress; a profession or calling. Actually, a career might be defined as a profession or calling that meets a large societal need, such as health care, justice or housing. As conceptualized in the pyramid diagram below, a career is subdivided into a number of smaller units.



A career is made up of a number of jobs. These jobs usually are so organized and interrelated they offer a course of continued progress to the top of a career ladder. A job is made up of a number of related activities such as planning, organizing, directing, controlling or preparing, installing and modifying. These activities, in turn, are divided into activity elements

such as collecting data and information, decision making, shaping or connecting, planning alternative courses of action, preparing presentations, scheduling activities, etc.

These elements, however, further break down into basic general skills such as those previously described and specific technical skills.

New Directions for the Liberal Arts College

This pyramidal concept can lead to a new and challenging thrust for the liberal arts college, one that preserves its integrity, offers its students a true education with professional opportunities, yet groups them to compete in the world of work with marketable skills, immediately upon graduation.

The point is that the liberal arts have always offered students basic general knowledge -- the history of mankind, the development and decline of societies, a picture of the world, its continents, seas, climates and resources, and many other forms of knowledge of man and the world around us. It hasn't always taught students how to use this knowledge in the form of transferable skills. Yet, it utilizes methodologies and disciplines -- skills -- in such useful and essential elements as the location and organization of information, analysis, synthesis, recognition of relationships, communication, and deductive and inductive thinking. What is needed is more emphasis on these basic general skills and a concerted effort to show students how these can be applied to certain career jobs in a practical way.

In addition, the college, upon selecting several career fields in which to specialize, can provide its students with access to necessary specific technical knowledge within these career fields or occupational clusters, be it planning, accounting or merchandising. In providing access, it can make arrangements with other nearby colleges and institutions to offer the courses on some exchange basis or utilize other alternatives.

Also the college can arrange with world of work firms and agencies for career job work or experiential learning opportunities that supplement a student's academic work. The result will be a graduating student who has been exposed to a real education plus some specific career training. Such a graduate immediately has several alternatives: 1) the possibility of going on to a professional graduate school; 2) competing immediately in the job market; 3) entering the job market immediately upon graduation and going to graduate school later on; 4) entering the job market immediately upon graduation and embarking on a life-long program of continuing education. Regardless of the alternative chosen immediately upon graduation, the student will leave the college much closer to the ideal of a truly educated citizen.

Example of a Liberal Arts College Offering a Speciality in Transportation Planning and Analysis

Let us consider a hypothetical liberal arts college that decides to take this suggested direction. In addition to a straight liberal arts program -- but one that emphasizes the acquisition of basic general skills -- it decides to offer as one of its specialized fields that of Transportation Analysis and Planning.

It already provides courses in Geography but adds or provides access to a course in the effects of geography on transportation. It has given basic courses in economics; now it adds or provides access to a course in the economics of transportation with special emphasis on the economics of overhead costs. It also furnishes access to courses in statistical analysis, transportation, etc.

An example of one model of a curriculum based on this concept follows:

Liberal Arts:
Transportation Analysis and Planning

Freshman Year	1st Semester	2nd Semester
Economics 101	3	
Math 101	3	
English 101	3	
Literature 101	3	
Physical Education 101	2	
Career Education 101	1	
	15	
Economics 102		3
Math 102		3
English 102		3
Sociology 102		3
Physical Education 102		2
Career Education 102		1
		15
Sophomore Year		
Economics 203: Money and Banking	3	
Economics 202: Statistics	4	
Language 101	3	
Health Education	2	
Geography 101: World Geography	3	
	15	

Sophomore Year (cont.)	1st Semester	2nd Semester
Economics 204: Mathematics for Economics		3
Language 102		3
World History		3
Introduction to Psychology		3
Social Organization and Dynamics		3
		15

Junior Year		
Fine Arts Elective	3	
Physics I	4	
Language 201	3	
History of Civilization	3	
Electives	2	
	15	
Fine Arts Elective		2
Physics II 302		4
Language 202		3
Inorganic Chemistry II		4
Electives		2
		15

Senior Year		
Economics 359: International Trade	3	
History Elective	3	
Behavioral Science	3	
Sociology 405: The Social Effects of Transportation	2	
Electives	4	
	15	
Social Psychology		3
Methodology of the Geographer		3
Methodology of the Historian		3

Senior Year (cont.)	1st Semester	2nd Semester
Electives		6
		15

Electives:

Application of Physical Sciences to Transportation	3	(Total 120
Computer Sciences	6	Semester
Transportation Market Research	3	hrs., 14
Transportation Cost Analysis	3	Elective
Economics 358: Economics of Transportation	3	hrs.)
Urban Geography	3	
Cartography	2	

With this kind of curriculum the student has the best of both worlds. He or she can join the company of educated men and women yet offer an employer those skills that are in demand. Furthermore, the student has flexibility to meet future shifts in employment demands, and is not limited to narrow technical skills.

The college, too, has a number of advantages. By offering several specialized fields, it can compete with a host of other small liberal arts colleges that, presumably, will specialize in other fields. By providing access to specific technical skills through interchange arrangements, the college does not have to add expensive resources in the form of faculty, space and equipment, or even in library volumes. Finally, it can keep its liberal arts faculty fully occupied and highly challenged and motivated -- provided they orient their offerings to basic general skills development and utilization.

In addition, the college, with career specialities in several occupational clusters, can interrelate with world of work practitioners in a number of

exciting, innovative ways such as cooperative education and work/study programs, experiential learning programs, special lectures, exhibits, demonstrations and seminars. Once the necessary linkages have been set up, the extent of the circuitry connecting undergraduate education, technical training, graduate education, and continuing education is almost limitless.